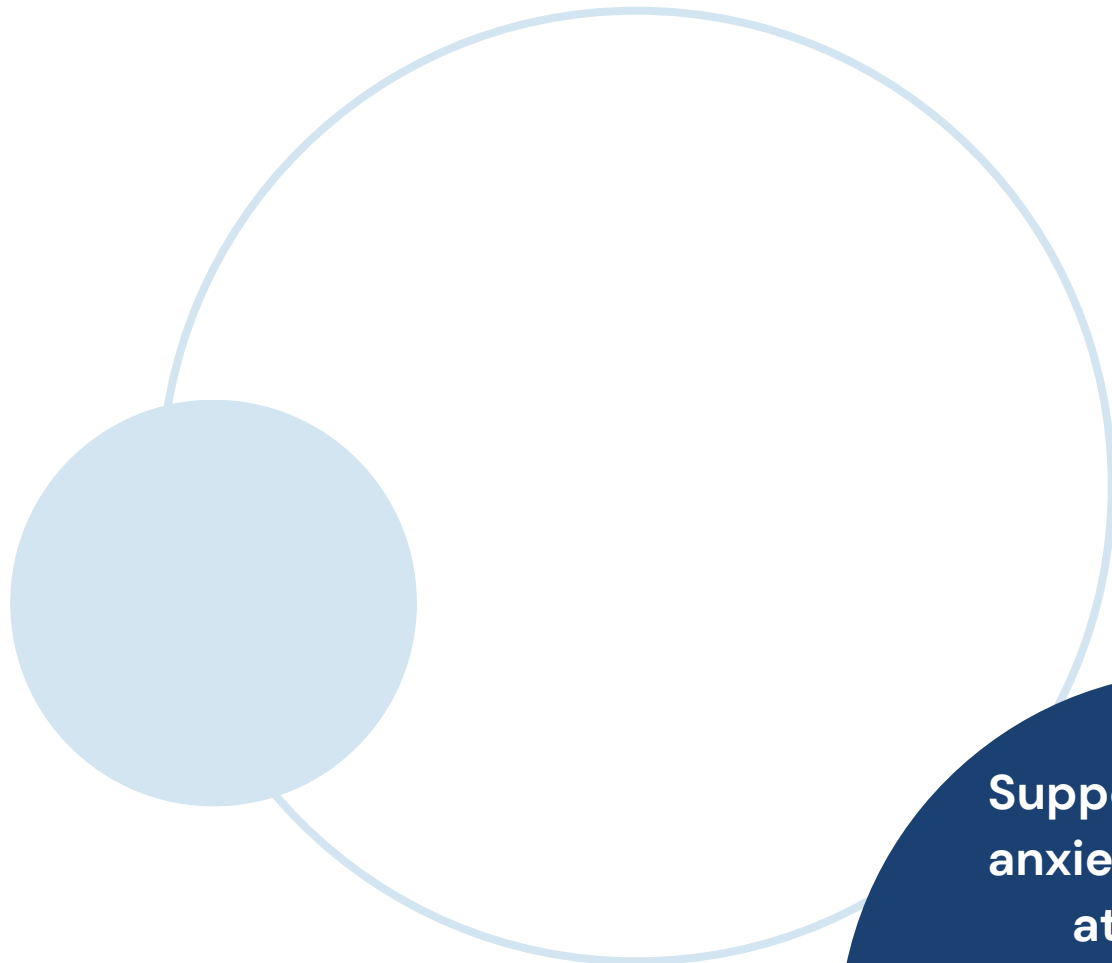


Augmenting Therapy Support Groups



Support groups for
anxiety and school
attendance
barriers

As seen on the BBC

Our Founder

My name is Ange McMillan

I'm a British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy-accredited counsellor, with 18 years of experience helping young people and adults.

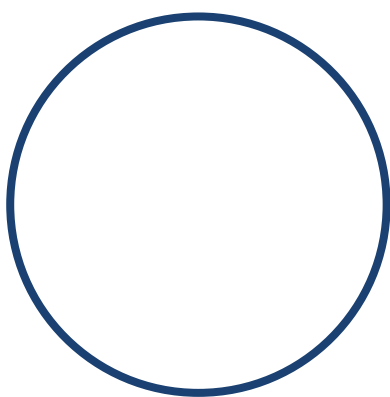
I've worked for Mind, The YMCA, Childline and The Terrence Higgins Trust and run counselling services for schools and sixth-form colleges.

I currently work in private practice as a counsellor and supervisor and am the director of Elemental Health Ltd, providing mental health support for young people and the adults in their lives.

Augmenting Therapy was founded to meet the needs of young people who were seeking alternatives to traditional therapy.

With incredible co-director Sally Griffith, we blend the use of immersive technologies, and creative approaches to help support young people experiencing anxiety and school attendance difficulties.

Technology on its own will not solve all the mental health problems our young people are facing – but I believe using it as a therapeutic tool can make a real and lasting difference.



Ange

Introduction

Our Mission

To reduce teenage anxiety through therapeutic group and 1-1 support.

We use immersive technologies and creative approaches to help young people share their stories, build social connections and thrive.

Our Vision

Our vision is a world where every child and young person can access compassionate support that enables them to lead fulfilling, connected lives, free from the limitations of anxiety.

Our Values

We prioritise making mental health support accessible to all. Using creative, cutting-edge approaches like Augmented Reality, we are committed to finding new, effective ways to engage neurodivergent, anxious young people – to support their well-being.

The Uncomfortable Truth

Our young people are struggling

20.3% of 8 to 16-year-olds and 23.3% of 17 to 19-year-olds are likely to have a probable mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2023).

With more than a quarter of a million (270,300) children and young people in England alone still waiting for mental health support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Children's Commissioner's Report 2024) we need to find new ways to support young people faster and to ensure that therapy services meet the needs of all.

We need to be adaptive, responsive and reflective of the rapidly changing world that young people inhabit.

The reality is that traditional talking therapy is NOT for everyone.

Many of the young people we support find traditional therapeutic methods difficult to engage with. Whether that's due to trauma, being neurodivergent, depression or high levels of anxiety, there can be times when talk or play can feel overwhelming.

In stretched services, we then end up in situations where those young people are labelled as 'difficult to engage', or miss a session due to feeling overwhelmed, and then lose their space.

This is a process we think unfairly discriminates against our marginalised clients.

At Augmenting Therapy, we believe in using approaches that young people already feel comfortable with to meet their needs and preferences. We feel strongly that we need to change the way we do things to make therapy more accessible and engaging for our young people.

Our intervention, which can be delivered by trained youth workers and therapists, offers an alternative – where young people can interact with calming, supportive virtual environments that blend with in-person group interaction.

Sharing Their Stories

How it started

Our work is centred on young people experiencing anxiety, and, in the last three years, this has been almost exclusively working with school attendance barriers.

We started running workshops in partnership with a local school, a Youth Service and a group of young people (and their carers) who had been outside education for a year.

We wanted to build a programme of support that was tailor-made to support their needs, and so we co-produced a 10-week programme that resulted in a **25% increase in attendance for every young person within the first 6 weeks.**

Through this, we learned that many of the young people we were supporting wanted something different to traditional therapy. They didn't want to sit there, being stared at, feeling like another adult would judge them or tell them what to do.

Instead, they wanted to show us how they felt

Our therapy spaces became filled with films, TV shows, characters, and computer games and we were invited to step into their realities, where technology had become a core element in supporting their well-being.

Which sparked an idea...

A New Approach

A new way of working

Art, guided visualisation and play are used regularly in our therapeutic work, yet many of our clients are not able to visualise (Aphantasia) or they may not feel comfortable enough to close their eyes, talk, draw or play.

Through our work, we learned that many of our young people were more likely to engage with games and gaming technologies, have access to mobile devices, and find it easier to communicate using these platforms than they might in more typical group environments.

So we asked ourselves how we could be creative using immersive technologies and **our approach was born!**

**“How might immersive technologies be used to
reduce teenage anxiety?”**

Over the past two years, we have explored how immersive technologies — Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and Gaming — might be used to help young people manage anxiety and increase their sense of connection.

We wanted to find ways of engaging the young people who DIDN'T want to engage with traditional talking therapy.

The Journey

The Therapeutic AR journey

Our unique guided approach combines the gentle art of digital plant creation with cutting-edge augmented reality technology, creating a safe and engaging space for young people to explore and express their feelings.

Through a series of personalised interactions, users create a virtual garden that reflects their inner world, leading to proven reductions in anxiety and depression and enhanced social connectedness.

1. Open the App

Begin an emotional journey in a secure, welcoming digital space designed specifically for young people seeking creative expression

2. Base Plant Selection

Choose a foundation stem that represents your core self – just as every person is unique, every base plant tells its own story

3. Plant Customisation

Express emotions through carefully chosen flowers, colours, and petal arrangements – allowing feelings to bloom naturally into visual form

4. Environment

Add weather elements that mirror emotional state – from sunny skies to pouring rain

5. AR Experience

Young people watch their emotional garden come to life through AR, creating a tangible connection between inner and outer worlds

6. Connection

Young people can share their creation with therapists or peers, opening conversations about their emotional journey in a natural, comfortable way

The Experience

Our Augmenting Therapy approach

Through the power of Augmented Reality, young people can cultivate their own virtual garden that mirrors their emotional world.

By creating personalised plants; young people find an engaging way to express their feelings and reduce anxiety. This innovative approach combines guided imagery with technology to create a supportive, nurturing space to reduce anxiety.



Playful AR Therapy

Experience the perfect blend of AR gaming technology and therapeutic support in an engaging format



Interactive AR World

See your emotional garden bloom in your own environment using immersive AR technology



Social Connection

Increase connectedness in a group setting by sharing the digital garden with support workers, peers or a therapist



Personalised Creation

Transform feelings into beautiful digital plants, increasing the capacity for emotional expression



Reduced anxiety

Proven to decrease anxiety and depression levels through interactive plant creation



Self-expression

Create a personalised safe space where every plant element tells a unique story

Reduced Anxiety

A reduction in anxiety and depression

During each session, we measured several responses, including those for anxiety and depression (using RCADS – a clinical anxiety measure), which dropped for almost all of our young people in session two – which is when we used the therapeutic intervention:

The average decrease in anxiety scores between sessions 1 and 2 was **14.24%**
With a p-value of 0.037, this decrease in anxiety scores is statistically significant.

Increased Social Connection

An increase in social connection

Young people need a sense of belonging to thrive. We measured their social connectedness across the sessions, noting that the therapeutic augmented reality session increased their sense of connection. One observation is that our technology encouraged young people to be playful, and we are now looking at how we can enhance this experience.

In our Session Rating Scale (SRS) each young person rated very highly that they had felt:

"Heard, understood and respected."

"That we worked on and talked about what (they) wanted to work on and talk about."

"The therapist's approach is a good fit for me."

"Overall, today's session was right for me."

In ALL of the sessions.

In a nutshell – it worked!

Feedback

What our young people said

"Takes the pressure off the person to just answer questions the whole time which can often not feel very helpful"

"The symbolic use of a flower is quite interesting and it makes sense to me when sometimes other metaphors don't always make much sense"

"This would be great for group sessions. Everyone could make their own flowers and then share them with the group."

"I like the more abstract way of exploring emotions and identity as it makes it less intense and in a format that might feel safer as you're talking about the flower rather than about yourself like it's not all on you"

"Using ways that don't require talking in the traditional sense could help make group therapy less daunting and more accessible and less like 'just something I have to get through' "

"I liked how I could put the plant wherever I wanted in the room. It felt like I was controlling my space and that gave me confidence"

"I liked that I could just focus on my plant—it helped take my mind off things"

"It will improve the experience of therapy definitely"

"The people running the session were lovely and really helpful and seem like they really care about making an app that works for young people and can be used to help us engage better in therapeutic settings"

"Might make counselling/therapy less awkward and uncomfortable as it won't just be sitting in front of someone and not having much to go on"

"A modern way of thinking and exploring emotions..we all spend a lot of time on devices now so tech-based stuff is really appealing"

"A way to help people have something to retreat to as a safe space and help balance things out"

Our Support Groups

We focus on supporting young people experiencing school attendance barriers

Our bespoke 6–10 week therapeutic support programme is delivered by our trained counsellors, in partnership with schools and youth organisations.

More than 1 in 5 children are persistently absent from school. But too often, the young person is labelled as being difficult or obstructive. They're the issue.

We don't need to give them a solution, we need to unlock the solution within them.

Our therapeutic support sessions focus on working with young people to empower them, not lecture them.

Blending immersive technologies, storytelling and creative approaches, this unique and innovative approach is designed to reduce anxiety and increase social connection

We work closely with you, the parents/carers, your support workers and the young person to build a programme tailored to their needs.

"A way to help people have something to retreat to as a safe space and help balance things out"

How They Work

How it works

Our support starts with a consultation to discuss the young people and the issues they face. We visit your organisation and meet your team so we can understand what your hopes are.

We then meet with the young people in a 1-1 setting with a safe adult to get to know them. This includes finding out about their challenges and, most importantly, their strengths.

Your team, parents/carers and the young people fill in some questionnaires to establish what might be happening.

We create a bespoke programme of support for the group with a minimum of 6 weekly sessions.

We provide all of the equipment and materials.

To protect confidentiality, all of the devices we provide are not connected to Wi-Fi.

Sessions include using our innovative approach, creative approaches and immersive storytelling.

Book your free consultation

Get in touch to talk about how we can support your young people:
augmentingtherapy@gmail.com or 07766764729.

Fully funded sessions take place in community settings

"I loved all the different tools, and also even tried and tested tools with new twists."

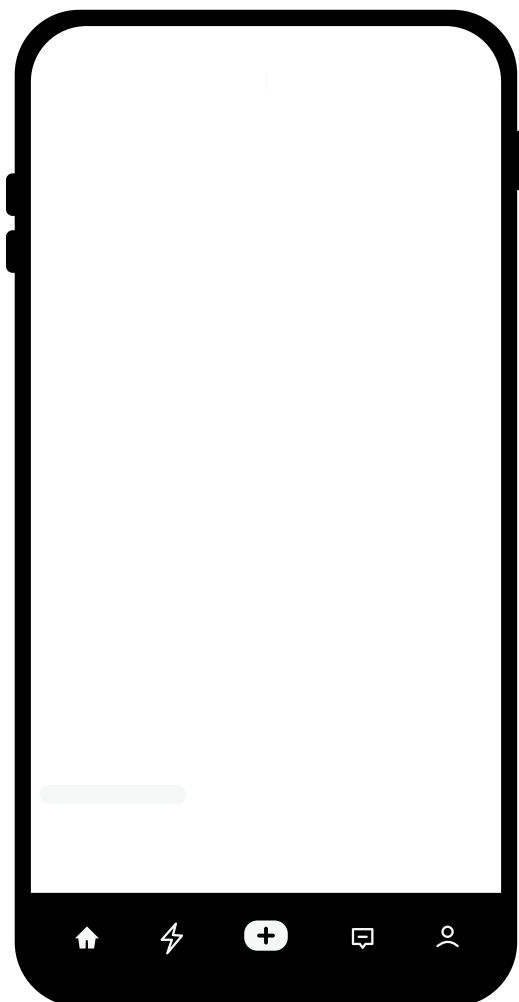
In the Press

Wales Children's Commissioner Rocío Cifuentes:

"Any intervention which could **engage young people** and **help their emotional wellbeing** was to be **welcomed.**"

Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Equality and Supporting Young People, Cllr Peter Bradbury :

"Through partnership working with external organisations, **young people have been given a voice** and had valuable input in developing this tool which provides a way for them to communicate using an approach that they feel comfortable with. Through the use of gaming technology, the app provides **an innovative approach which aims to have a positive impact on the lives of young people.**"





**Visit our website
to find out more:**

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or

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